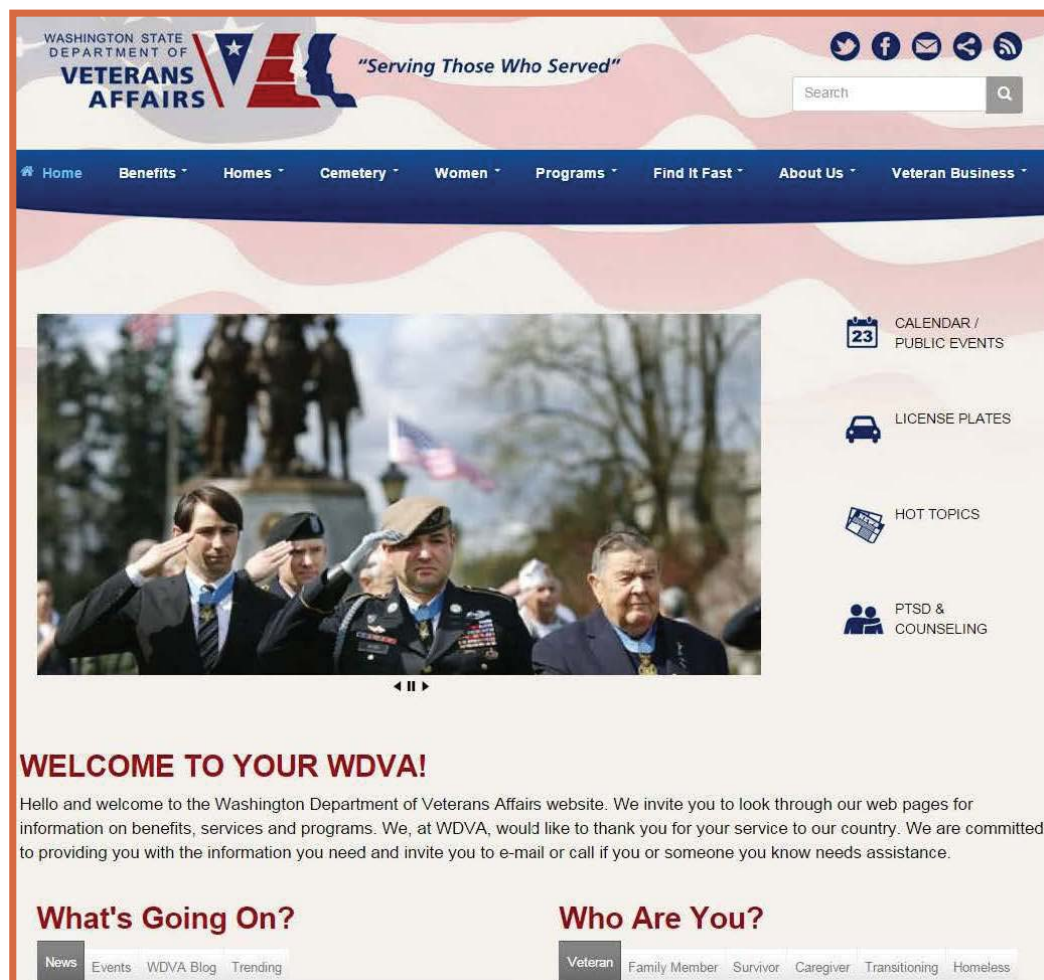


Call 1-800-562-2308 for Statewide Assistance

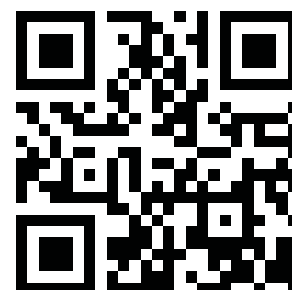
Winter 2015

OUR NEW WDVA WEBSITE IS LIVE!

After a decade of using the same site, WDVA has made the leap to a new website platform and design. With responsive design for your tablet or mobile device, one click navigation to anywhere on the site, an in depth search feature, and a clean design we hope that your experience on the WDVA site is both informative and intuitive. If you viewed our old site using compatibility mode, you will want to turn that off now. If you have a website that links to ours, please check your links. A huge thank you to all of our community partners and staff who helped create this new site! Please take a moment to browse at <http://www.dva.wa.gov/>. If you run into something you are unable to find or have questions, comments or suggestions please email jenniferm@dva.wa.gov



Scan the QR code
below with your
smartphone to go
directly to the new
WDVA webpage!





A Note from the Director

Lourdes E. Alvarado-Ramos (Alfie)

alfie@dva.wa.gov

As we begin another year, I would like to share with you how proud I am of the WDVA team. We know we do great things and sometimes don't pause to look back to really understand the impact of our work.

We have less homeless veterans throughout the state because of our Building 9 for Veterans, financial assistance programs and great partnerships. We prevent homelessness every day by helping veterans manage their assets through the Estate Management Program. Veterans in our colleges and universities are staying in and graduating because of our VetCorps program helping them adjust to this new setting. Our older veterans are living with dignity because of the loving care provided in our State Veterans Homes and our connecting them to other benefits. Justice involved veterans are finding new meaning to their military service and with our help and our partners, are making life changing decisions that result in becoming productive community members. We are connecting employers to the amazing talent veterans bring to the workplace and they are hiring them! A veteran needs purpose and a family wage job is all about mission and purpose.

We continue to help partners access state and federal funding to expand their community services and that helps add capacity to serve veterans. We are still growing one person at a time because of our ability to bring in external resources. Our cemetery at Medical Lake continues to serve a large geographical area in Eastern Washington and the messages of gratitude come every day for the compassionate care families are given. Hundreds of veterans and families who are unable to access VA counseling are relying on our Behavioral Health services to get lifesaving services that keep family integrity and help our veterans manage their issues. Women veterans are getting gender sensitive services provided by women service officers, counselors and peers. We are connected to social media and WDVA has a presence in many other agency sites which allows us to take our message deep and wide.

We are deeply involved in the transition of our service members from our military bases to our communities. We know that closing the transition gaps to our communities is the ultimate prevention strategy and it is working. Our work with the Military Transition Council and the Islandwood Convening, one geared toward exiting service members and the other toward their families, is groundbreaking. What we do in Washington State is being replicated in other states so our impact transcends our state boundaries. Innovation is not new to us and I hope we keep bringing our wonderfully crazy ideas to work to continue making a difference. Our outreach efforts are paying off and many more veterans and their families are seeking their earned benefits. We are now on a mission to bring more of our older rural veterans and Vietnam brothers and sisters home!

None of this can happen without the support and leadership of our Business Office, HR, Communications, Information Technology and our Work Studies and Volunteers. It really takes a village to serve a vet! On behalf of your WDVA Leadership Team, thank you for your creativity, resourcefulness, patience and service to each other and our veterans and their families.

Director, WDVA



18 Year "Veteran" of WDVA Named WSH Superintendent

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs is proud to announce the appointment of Walter H. "Willie" Slusarski Jr. as superintendent of the Washington Soldiers Home in Orting.

"Willie brings a unique perspective to this leadership position that I am confident will help him guide his team over the coming years," said Gary Condra, WDVA deputy director.

"His 18 years with WDVA have given him an opportunity to learn from the ground up how the agency serves veterans and their families."

Slusarski lives in East Bremerton with his wife. He has three daughters and eight grandchildren. He earned an AAS in liberal arts at Olympic College in 1998.

Slusarski joined WDVA in 1996 as a work study in Bremerton, while completing classes at Olympic College, and later received a bachelor of arts degree in Pastoral Ministries from Nazarene Bible College.

A year later he was hired as a full-time veterans benefits assistant. He moved to the USDVA Regional Office in Seattle in 2003, before returning to WDVA to assume the role of veterans benefits specialist at the Washington Veterans Home in 2006.

In 2012 he moved into the administration office as the superintendent's assistant and began his administrator-in-training program soon after. Slusarski completed the AIT Program and became a licensed nursing home administrator in March 2014.

"From day one, I've been impressed with WDVA and its commitment to serving veterans and their families," Slusarski said.

"After moving to the Veterans Home, I knew I'd found my niche and worked to learn as much as I could about the skilled nursing facility. The Administrator-in-Training program was an opportunity to take my passion for serving veterans and their families and put it into daily practice. As Superintendent at the Soldiers Home, I look forward to continuing that practice alongside the most dedicated team of professionals I've ever had the privilege of working with."

A veteran of the United States Navy, Slusarski enlisted in 1971 as a seaman's apprentice. He rose to the rank of chief petty officer before entering the Limited Duty Officer Program and commissioning as an ensign. His service included duty as a military policeman and service aboard three submarines, two submarine repair ships, one ammunition ship and two tours at a Trident missile facility. He served until 1996 and retired at the rank of lieutenant.

WDVA operates three State Veterans Homes and provides both Medicaid and Medicare rehabilitative services to veterans and their spouses or widows. Opening in 1891, the Washington Soldiers Home is the oldest facility, sitting on 180 acres in Orting. The Soldiers Home cares for up to 184 veterans, spouses or widows.



**2015 LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGAN
JANUARY 12, 2015**

Bills of interest to veterans and their families are listed on our website at

<http://www.dva.wa.gov/about-wdva/legislative-updates>

**To receive weekly email alerts on the status of bills impacting veterans and their families.,
sign up here:**

<http://listserv.wa.gov/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=wdva&A=1>

Scout Eagle Project Inspired By Grandfather



Cody Mekus, a Life Scout and member of Boy Scout Troop 325, Spokane, Washington recently completed his Eagle Scout Leadership and Service project at the Washington State Veterans Cemetery Medical Lake, Washington. He decided to focus his Leadership and Service project in a manner that would honor and serve the Inland Northwest's veteran community.

Cody was inspired to do so because of his family's military service, namely that of his grandfather, Maj Gary Ferguson who served from 1968 to 1990 and served during both Vietnam and Desert Storm. Maj Ferguson was in command of the AF Special Investigations detachment at RAF Bentwaters, England upon his military retirement.

He also served in the AF Medical Service as a hospital administrator. The other inspiration came from Cody's great grandfather, Bruce Ferguson who enlisted in the Navy and was separated after it was determined he was too young to serve. Bruce later joined the Army Air Corps and subsequently the Air Force, where he served as bombardier and navigator of B17s, B-25s, B-29s, and B-52s. Bruce served in both theaters during World War II, where on one mission he was the navigator on a backup aircraft to the Enola Gay. Bruce was also a veteran of the Korean War.

Cody's entire project took 7 months of planning and coordination, with the physical work being completed over two weekends in late Sep and early Oct. The project included designing and installing two arbors, a drainage system and two dry creek beds for storm water runoff and designing and installing a handrail. The handrail was a key safety feature, which was added to a walkway between the administration and the committal shelter. The handrail will serve staff, volunteers as well as cemetery guests as they make their way between these facilities, by preventing falls. Cody is also compiling a digital archive of veteran photographs, taken during their military service as part of an ongoing legacy project. These photos will be on display in the cemetery lobby serving to recognize and honor the region's veterans.

Perpetual Plaque To Recognize Cemetery Volunteers

The Washington State Veterans Cemetery was presented with a Volunteer of the Year perpetual plaque to help recognize the outstanding commitment and effort put forth by the members of the surrounding communities.

The cemetery has over 100 volunteers that contribute their time in a variety of way to ensure both veterans and their families receive the utmost dignity and respect during a very difficult time in their lives.

The placque was made possible by the efforts of CMSgt (ret) Dick Barry USAF, SSG (ret) Bob Wormell USA, and Mr Blaine Gibson of Windsor Plywood in Spokane who donated their time and materials to construct it. We thank each of you for your generosity and support of our mission.

<http://www.khq.com/clip/10666344/saluting-the-brave-veterans-honor-volunteers-that-help-them>



2014 Washington State Outstanding Service to Veterans Awardees



Washington State's Outstanding Service to Veterans Awards recognize individuals who devote time and energy to improving the lives of Washington's veterans.

The awards are presented at a special luncheon in Auburn, following the awardees participation in the City's annual Veterans Day Parade.

2014 Team Award- WA National Guard Joint Services Support Program (WNG JSS). (Left - Chaplain(LTC) Don Brewer and Annie Deandrea)

The WA National Guard Joint Service Support Program assists members of all reserve components in Washington State. They offer short term as well as long term financial assistance to members of the National Guard and Reserve. For fiscal year 2014 they assisted a total of 1,037 service members with direct financial assistance totaling over \$363,000.00. For 2014 they assisted 369 members with their employment needs. This group volunteered a total of 14,239 hours for Family Program events. They are dedicated to meeting the needs of the members of National Guard and Reserves.

Distinguished Service Award - Robin Baker. (third from left)

Robin works for the Department of Defense as the JBLM Director of Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Robin is a veteran and the anchor for the successful transition of 1000 of veterans to our communities. She employs innovative, out-of-the-box thinking that produces partnerships, programs and initiatives bringing veterans unemployment below state average.

Superior Award - Keirsten Lyons. (fourth from left)

As Regional Service to Armed Forces Director, Keirsten single handedly developed a non-existent Service to Armed Forces program into one of the most robust programs nationwide. She works tirelessly to develop and implement meaningful programs supporting service members, their families and veterans in 22 counties.

Distinguished Service Award- Robert Donaldson.(fifth from left)

Robert was instrumental in assisting over 6,000 veterans and their families file for their federal and state benefits. He constantly mans the American Legion booths at various conferences statewide and he provides valuable information to veterans and their families. As the District Chair for Disaster Preparedness he is responsible for getting the Pierce County Posts prepared to assist residents of Pierce County in the event of a disaster.

Distinguished Service Award – Lloyd Gabriel. (sixth from left)

"Gabe" is a former Army/Air Corps Prisoner of War from WWII. As a member of the American Ex-Prisoners of War organization, he was very instrumental in assisting his fellow POW's and their spouses in applying for federal and state benefits. For many years Gabe has been the cornerstone of the Tri-Cities Chapter of the American Ex-Prisoners of War, serving as their Service Officer and editor of their newsletter.

Distinguished Service Award - Keith Reyes. (far right)

Keith has been instrumental in reactivating the Military Order of Purple Heart Chapter 12 in the Seattle area. Keith was instrumental in creating a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Program at the Mt. Vernon Veterans Affairs Community Base Outpatient Clinic.



Thanks to the Washington State Military Order of the Purple Heart, we can take preventative action for at-risk of homelessness veterans and their families.

On Dec. 18, 2014, they presented \$30,000 to WDVA director Alfie Alvarado-Ramos for our Homeless Veterans Programs.

Our thanks and gratitude to this wonderful organization!



(l-r) Jim Sims-past MOPH National Commander, Alfie Alvarado-Ramos-WDVA director, Bruce McKenty-past MOPH National Commander and Jim Cordeiro-Washington State Department Commander.

WDVA's Building 9 received 40 Quilts with matching pillow cases on in December from a local quilting club. They have been doing this for the past few years, and when the quilts are given out there is a glow on the veterans' faces- proof that someone unknown to them really does care!

These are dedicated women who are committed to giving back to veterans and love doing this work, and we love receiving the quilts.

The quilt pictured here is a special patriotic quilt that is made each year for WDVA Building 9 to present to a veteran who has faced challenges and is doing very well in their recovery.



For more information about the Building 9 Transitional Housing program, contact program manager Ray Switzer at 360-895-4382.

The Saints Car Club of Port Orchard once again stepped forward to make a donation to the WDVA Building 9 Transitional Program veterans to assist with Holiday celebrations. Thank you to Dennis McElwain for presenting the check to Building 9 Program Manager Ray Switzer!



Sarge's Place in Forks received 5 bicycles for veterans in the program there, thanks to the partnership WDVA Building 9 has with VET-Bikes.org and the talents of Michael (Mike the Mechanic) Hines.



American Legion Auxiliary Gift Shops - A Year in the Making



American Legion Auxiliary at Washington Soldiers Home



American Legion Auxiliary at Washington Veterans Home



American Legion Auxiliary at Spokane Veterans Home

Every year American Legion Auxiliary members from around our state spend hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars preparing for the annual gift shops at the State's Veterans Homes and Veterans Hospitals.

They fundraise, shop, remove price tags, store the items collected, fundraise some more, coordinate pick-up of gifts donated and find more storage to keep the gifts safe until the time arrives to set up the gifts shops for our resident and hospitalized veterans.

Why?

Because it provides each of our residents the opportunity to provide gifts to their families during the holidays.

Shortly after Thanksgiving, Santa's Elves arrive in mass at each home and facility to set up shop. Merchandise is arranged, wrapping stations are prepared and shipping stations are equipped.

For the next two days, volunteers from various Posts, organizations along with some active duty soldiers and sailors help the veterans shop for their family members.

Next step is to have the gifts wrapped and mailed to the veterans' loved ones.

All of this is done at no cost to the veteran!

WDVA is so grateful for this annual outpouring of love and appreciation to our residents, and the belief of the American Legion Auxiliary that "Each minute, hour and day we give is another opportunity for our resident and hospitalized veterans to feel normal".





ESGR Patriotic Employer Award Presented

Washington National Guardsman SSG Kevin Wharton surprised his supervisor at the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs - Rafael Lozano - with an ESGR Patriotic Employer Award this week. SSG Wharton serves with B Co, 56th Information Operations out of Camp Murray and as a Veterans Benefit Specialist at the WDVA headquarters in Olympia. Wharton nominated Lozano for the award to thank him for "always having my 6"!

The ESGR Patriotic Employer Award was created by the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve to publicly recognize individuals who provide outstanding patriotic support and cooperation to their employees, who, like the citizen warriors before them, have answered their nation's call to serve.

VISIT THE WDVA CALENDAR FOR UPCOMING EVENTS:

Do you have an event you would like posted?

Email your flyer and event details to communications@dva.wa.gov

Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War

You are cordially invited to attend the commemoration honoring all Vietnam Veterans

Date: Saturday, February 7, 2015

Time: 11:00 A.M. Arrive early for coffee

Place: Tulalip Hibulb Cultural Center,
6410 23rd Ave. N.E., Tulalip, WA 98271,
www.HibulbCulturalCenter.org,

Phone: 360-716-2600

Sponsor: WA State Gold Star Mothers

Special Pinning Ceremony for Vietnam Veterans

Guest Speaker: Michael Reagan, Vietnam Veteran

Contact Info: Myra Rintamaki, 206-235-0348

Calling All Washington Veterans and Families!

Come learn about the
benefits you EARNED
while serving in
the military!

FEBRUARY 19, 2015

10am - Noon

Clallam County Commissioners Office

223 East 4th Street, Room 160

Port Angeles, WA 98362

1-800-562-0132 option 1

**Governor's Veterans Affairs Advisory
Committee (VAAC)
Town Hall
10:00am – Noon**

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

- Receive information on employment, education and housing benefits.
- Learn about the wide range of benefits available including compensation and pension and military funeral honors.
- Find out about counseling, financial assistance and support for you and your family.
- Learn how to enroll in VA Healthcare and apply for state and federal benefits.

Visit us at www.dva.wa.gov



T'was the Season.....



of
Caring



of Sharing



of Respect



of Honor



QUICK FACTS ABOUT YOUR VETERANS *CHOICE CARD*

VISIT WWW.VA.GOV/OPA/CHOICEACT/ FOR MORE INFORMATION.

Before your Veterans Choice Card can be used, you must first meet the following test of eligibility for *Choice Card* benefits. If, after following Step 1 of the test you are not eligible for benefits, just hold on to your Card - you do not need to call us.

TO FIND OUT IF YOU'RE ELIGIBLE:



PERSONALLY ASSESS YOUR ELIGIBILITY FOR *CHOICE CARD* BENEFITS.

Before you call us, ask yourself these four simple questions:

- 1) Have you been told by your local VA medical facility that you will need to wait more than 30 days from your preferred date or the date medically determined by your physician? **OR**
- 2) Is your current residence more than 40 miles from the closest VA health care facility? **OR**
- 3) Do you need to travel by plane or boat to the VA medical facility closest to your home? **OR**
- 4) Does a geographic challenge, such as extensive distances around water or other geologic formations, such as mountains, present a significant travel hardship?



If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be eligible to use your *Choice Card*. **VERIFY YOUR ELIGIBILITY by calling 866-606-8198.**

When you call us, please be prepared to provide us with any other health insurance coverage you have, such as employer or union-provided health plans, so we can assess coverage responsibilities.

IMPORTANT: If you do not receive approval, you may be responsible for some or all of the costs of the non-VA treatment you receive.

NOT ELIGIBLE RIGHT NOW? NO NEED TO DO ANYTHING! JUST KEEP YOUR CARD!

If you are not eligible to use the *Choice Card* right now, keep your card in a safe and convenient location. There is no need to call us.

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR SERVICE TO
OUR COUNTRY!**



The “Next” Greatest Generation Is Coming Home - Are We Ready?

By Doug Pfeffer, Director of External Relations at RallyPoint/6 253.514.3714

Johnny is coming home. After more than 10 years of conflict, and a troop buildup that saw our Armed Forces swell in size, the Country is now facing an unprecedented Troop Drawdown. From the Army alone, we can expect to see almost **100,000 Soldiers** trade their camouflage patterns in for suits and ties. And that’s not even taking into consideration the other services, as well as those who would have left the military anyway. It is an exodus that we have not faced since the end of World War II.

Yes, it’s true, we did also face the return of troops after both Korea and Vietnam, but these were slow and steady returns, as opposed to what we’re seeing today, as in 1945, which is a massive amount of Soldiers, all of sudden being told that Uncle Sam no longer requires their services. The numbers are daunting. But we’ve faced it before.

In 1945, our Greatest Generation not only weathered the storm...they thrived. Hundreds of thousands returned home to not only make their way into the private sector, but they found good jobs...at good pay. They built homes, raised families and put money back into the economy. They went to College, and instilled in their children a desire to also attend College. They didn’t only survive...they thrived. And how did they do it... *Community Support!*

Communities didn’t just say thanks, they showed their thanks. They didn’t just pacify Veterans with minimum wage jobs...they built and supported training programs that enabled Veterans to learn a new trade. They offered to mentor Veterans looking to break into a new career. They didn’t just buy them lunch and say thanks...they invited them to the table.

Veterans coming home today need career opportunities. Our unemployment rates are already too high. If Veterans cannot find meaningful employment that unemployment rate will only rise. They will wind up falling back on Government assistance, but this will only be a short term solution, as a lack of jobs will increase the risk for homelessness, and poverty. All the while, money is *not* being pumped back into the economy by our Veterans. But if we do everything that we can, and work to retrain these heroes, and connect them with true career opportunities, the opposite will occur. Our unemployment rates will drop. Veterans will build and purchase homes. The real estate market will have a true shot at stabilizing itself, with so many families all of sudden not moving around as much. They will put down roots, and pump money back into the economy. Stabilization will lead to more families saving money for College, which their kids will flock to. Take a step back and you’ll see not just how valuable Veterans are to Corporate America...but also how valuable they are to America’s Communities. Home ownership will lead to a desire to participate in local elections...maybe even a decision to run for local office. **Leadership is a crazy thing...it doesn’t just go away.**

As a Country, we are at a tipping point when it comes to our Veterans. It can go one way or another. They can either be a tremendous boon to our economy, or a drain that could tear Communities apart. The decision is ours...*as a Community*. Will we do nothing and watch as our Veterans suffer in silence, or will we take our place next to them, as members of The “Next” Greatest Generation?

VA EXPANDS ELIGIBILITY FOR VA HEALTH CARE RELATED TO MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

Expansion closes a gap in health care eligibility

Washington, DC – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), under authority from the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of 2014 (“VACAA”), today announced expanded eligibility for Veterans in need of mental health care due to sexual assault or sexual harassment that occurred during their military service. This trauma is commonly known as military sexual trauma (MST).

This expansion, which primarily pertains to Reservists and National Guard members participating in weekend drill, gives the authority to offer Veterans the appropriate care and services needed to treat conditions resulting from MST that occurred during a period of inactive duty training. Veterans can learn more about VA's MST-related services online at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp



**EMPLOYMENT EVENTS, TRAINING
OPPORTUNITIES, JOB ASSISTANCE,
GO TO THE JBLM
OPPORTUNITIES UNLIMITED
FACE BOOK & JOB WEB-SITE PAGES**

www.facebook.com/JBLMUnlimited
www.jblmunlimited.com/jobs




Keep informed about upcoming Veteran events by checking our Calendar/Public Events Page often

<http://www.dva.wa.gov/calendar>

Have an event of interest to Veterans you want others to know about?

Send fliers and information to communications@dva.wa.gov

WDVA Veteran Voices
PO Box 41150
1102 Quince Street SE
Olympia, WA 98504-1150

1-800-562-0132 opt. 1
communications@dva.wa.gov

Veterans Voices is published every other month for Washington veterans and all interested in news affecting veterans and their families. View previous editions here:
<http://www.dva.wa.gov/about-wdva/brochures-and-newsletters>

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